

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Monday, August 31, 2015, to discuss the Forest Preserve Health Assessment.

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 8:03 p.m. The meeting was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Celia Craze, Director of Planning & Community Development; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Valerie Elliott, Susan Gregersen, Bob Snyder, Willis Witter, Donna Almquist and Damien Ossi, Forest Preserve Advisory Board; Brian Almquist, Susan Smithers, Owen Kelly, Susan Barnett, Jason Morton, Kristen Fletcher and others.

Mayor Jordan noted that the purpose of the work session was for Council to discuss the Forest Preserve Health Assessment.

Celia Craze, Director of Planning and Community Development, explained that Council had directed staff in November 2014, to proceed with actions necessary to contract with a professional forest biologist/ecologist to prepare a forest health assessment of the Greenbelt Forest Preserve. She said staff drafted a Request for Proposals (RFP) to secure the services and the RFP was reviewed by the Forest Preserve Advisory Board (FPAB) at its February and March 2015 meetings. Ms. Craze said significant edits were made by the FPAB to the original RFP and the FPAB submitted a list of five names to receive the RFP, all of which were forwarded the RFP. In addition, staff researched other firms with experience developing forest health assessments as well as firms found through an internet search for forest ecologists and forest biologists. Finally, staff consulted with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources directory of Forest Conservation Act approved providers. A total of 145 RFP's were mailed or emailed in April and the RFP was posted on the City's website.

Ms. Craze said a total of five (5) responses were received to the RFP ranging in cost from \$28,450 to \$184,485. She said staff reviewed all the proposals and found one to be non-responsive and the other four outlined a comprehensive work program which followed the requested services as spelled out in the RFP. Based on the proposed costs, and the staff estimate of \$25,000 for the project, staff proceeded with a detailed review and consideration of the proposals received from ESA for \$31,800 and A. Morton Thomas (AMT) for \$28,450. The proposals were then forwarded to the FPAB for their review and comment.

Ms. Craze and Valerie Elliott, Chair of the FPAB, said the proposals were reviewed by the FPAB at its meeting of August 20, 2015. She said the FPAB agreed to take no formal action (report) on the review but agreed to forward all emails with their thoughts. Ms. Craze said it was staff's opinion that both the proposals from ESA and AMT would meet the City's needs, but some members of the FPAB expressed concern about the work done by ESA in other areas.

Mayor Jordan asked Mr. McLaughlin for his opinion of the RFP process. Mr. McLaughlin said it was a normal RFP process, similar to the process used for all professional services, where the services are described in detail and a timeline and format for responses are identified.

Mayor Jordan asked if members of the public were in attendance at the August FPAB meeting. Ms. Elliott said yes.

Ms. Davis stressed that whatever recommendations are made as a result of the Forest Preserve health assessment do not necessarily mean that Council will take action on the recommendations. Mayor Jordan said there will be ample opportunity for Council, staff, advisory boards and the public to review the final product prior to any actions being taken.

Mayor Jordan asked if the FPAB had reviewed the list of firms that the RFP was to be mailed to. Susan Gregersen, FPAB member, said yes.

Mr. Roberts expressed concern that the RFP didn't have a cost included. He said if the work had been appropriately budgeted at \$8,000 or \$10,000, only individual biologists would have bid on the work and not the large landscape companies.

Ms. Davis and Ms. Pope said a biologist alone would not be adequate to conduct the health assessment. They noted that a team with different expertise areas was needed to provide a proper assessment.

Ms. Gregersen spoke in support of the AMT proposal.

Ms. Davis thanked staff and members of the FPAB for their work on the RFP and review of the proposals. She noted that everyone is concerned about the Forest Preserve and seem to agree that a health assessment needs to be done, but differ on how it is to be done.

Bob Snyder, FPAB member, spoke in opposition of awarding the contract for the health assessment of the Forest Preserve.

Willis Witter, FPAB member, spoke in support of the proposal submitted by AMT.

Donna Almquist, FPAB member, spoke in opposition of awarding the contract for the health assessment of the Forest Preserve.

Damien Ossi, FPAB member, spoke in support of the proposal submitted by AMT.

Brian Almquist, 112 Hedgewood Drive, spoke in opposition of awarding the contract for the health assessment of the Forest Preserve.

Susan Smithers, 10-J Laurel Hill Road, expressed concern about the integrity and future of the Forest Preserve. She said the Forest Preserve should remain untouched and the right people should conduct the health assessment.

Owen Kelly, 15 Lakeside Drive, commented on the emotional impact of the Forest Preserve which he said feels like a wild place. He expressed concern regarding a change to the Forest Preserve Maintenance and Management Guidelines.

Jason Morton, 24 Court Ridge, expressed his support for the health assessment of the Forest Preserve.

Mayor Jordan and Ms. Davis stressed Council's strong support of the Forest Preserve. They said that no member wants to discard the Forest Preserve Guidelines but want a review of the Guidelines. Ms. Davis noted that Council wants to see the Forest Preserve remain undisturbed but have concerns (invasive species, human interaction, etc.) about the health of the forest. She said the assessment will provide Council with this type of information. Council, staff, advisory boards and the public will have an opportunity to review the health assessment before any actions, if any, are taken. Ms. Mach and Ms. Pope commented on the need for the health assessment.

Kristen Fletcher, 24-K Ridge Road, expressed her appreciation to Council and staff for their work on the RFP for the health assessment of the Forest Preserve and for funding the project. Mr. McLaughlin answered several questions regarding the RFP process.

Ms. Almquist said she has spoken with professionals who said invasives will not take over the Forest Preserve.

Mr. Roberts said he was not interested in having an engineering firm assess the Forest Preserve. He said he prefers to leave the Forest Preserve alone.

Ms. Pope, Ms. Mach, and Ms. Davis complimented staff and the FPAB for their thorough work throughout this process. They said two qualified proposals were received, but the one with the community input is what would work best.

Ms. Davis commented on a letter to the editor in last week's News Review that inferred she should not have shown up at a FPAB meeting. She noted that all advisory board and committee meetings are open for the public as well as members of Council.

Mayor Jordan complimented the FPAB for its work on the RFP and the review of the proposals. He said everyone is very passionate about the Forest Preserve. Mayor Jordan said the RFP specified the key issues of the assessment and a good faith effort was made to publicize the RFP.

In response to a question from Mayor Jordan, Ms. Craze said she expected a kickoff meeting with staff and Council in January and the assessment would move forward in the spring.

Council requested the award of the Forest Preserve health assessment be included on its next meeting agenda for action.

Informational Items

Mayor Jordan said he, along with the Mayors of the Cities of Bowie and Hyattsville, will be meeting with Thomas Himler, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Budget, Finance and Administration for Prince George's County regarding the School Resource Office funding.

The meeting ended at 10:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*

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